



Iowa Outdoors

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

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TWO PUBLIC MEETING DATES TO DISCUSS POPULATION STATUS AND MANAGEMENT OPTIONS FOR BOBCATS AND RIVER OTTERS HAVE CHANGED

CLEAR LAKE – The population status and potential management options for bobcats and river otters will be discussed at a series of state-wide public meetings.

Both bobcats and river otters have shown substantial population increases in recent years. Bobcat numbers have grown on their own, to the point where the animal was de-listed from the threatened species list in 2003. River otters were first re-introduced in Iowa in 1985 and have grown to the point where their presence has been confirmed in all 99 counties.

Management scenarios for both species will be outlined at the meetings. The Iowa Department of Natural Resources is taking comments on a potential river otter trapping season, and a potential bobcat hunting and trapping season. Both seasons under consideration would be limited to certain areas of the state, and have quotas, with the possibility of expanding statewide in the future. Potential harvest of both species also takes into consideration maintaining population growth and distribution throughout the state for otters and bobcats.

Details on potential management scenarios under consideration by the DNR are available at www.iowadnr.com, then click on wildlife. There is an opportunity to send comments directly from the page.

The following information meetings are scheduled. Please note that some of the dates have changed.

Feb. 21, Pin Oak Nature Center, Chariton, at 7 p.m.

Feb. 22, Iowa Lakes Community College, 1900 Grande Avenue, Spencer at 7 p.m.

Feb. 23, F & M Bank, backdoor, alley entrance, 101 East Main St., Manchester, at 7 p.m.

Both species are open to the Iowa Department of Natural Resources depredation policy. For more information, contact Ron Andrews, state furbearer biologist, at 641-425-5088.

Public comment is being accepted throughout the process for both Otters and Bobcats, which seeks final approval by June.

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DEER HARVEST IN 2005-06 JUMPS

By Joe Wilkinson

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

Hunters did their job in the just completed deer season. Wildlife officials now will compare simulations and computer models with aerial deer counts, postcard survey responses and other data to determine how much Iowa's deer population has dropped and future hunting pressure.

While the hard results won't be in hand until April, a pretty solid estimate comes from known sales of 2005 deer tags, alongside 2004's success rates. Combining them places Iowa's 05-06 harvest at 211,600 deer; a new record and up 17,000 from 2004-05, and the previous mark. The increase was driven by increased sales of antlerless deer tags; primarily through county-specific quotas and two new seasons, targeting does. "The vast majority of the increase came from the 16,841 licenses sold, and the (estimated) 10,105 antlerless deer taken, during the November season," explains Willy Suchy, deer biologist for the Department of Natural Resources. "Also, the late January season, and the estimated 3,488 more deer taken then. If you look where we sold them; it was in the counties where we needed to kill more deer."

That November season--the three days following Thanksgiving--allowed firearms in a period previously reserved for bowhunters. A seven-day extension of the January

season in southern Iowa allowed center-fire rifles to be used. Each was a first for Iowa. Meanwhile, bowhunters, fueled by increased access to antlerless tags, took an estimated 32,756 deer; up 2,731 from the previous season.

Less pronounced increases in the two muzzleloader season harvests and deer taken by nonresidents and hunters in urban, park and depredation hunts helped offset slight declines in youth, disabled and regular shotgun seasons.

Wildlife officials have been under pressure to reduce deer numbers throughout much of the state. The midwinter estimates are provided to state lawmakers as they pore over dozens of bills requesting specific deer legislation. A key figure is the number of does killed...and those *remaining*. "In each of the last three seasons, the doe harvest has increased and has been higher than the buck harvest. That reduces the reproductive capacity of the herd," explains Suchy. After the 2003 season, he estimated about 400,000 deer in Iowa. Last year, the estimate was about 370,000. Heading into this year, it should be about 310,000, and with a lower percentage of female deer. "After 2003, we saw the (post season) populations leveling off. After '04, reproduction started heading down. This year, we should see substantial drops in reproduction," forecasts Suchy.

Those drops, harvests and recommendations for the upcoming season will become firm as information from '05 hunters and this winter's aerial surveys is compiled. "(Our) post card survey comes from a representative sample of hunter groups; bow hunters, shotgun hunters and others, asking how many deer they killed," says Suchy. "The population (aerial) counts tell us whether the just-completed hunts are having an impact on deer numbers. I can put together a simulation to show how many deer are out there."

If the harvest figures are confirmed, the deer decline should be about 15%-20% this year and near goals set by the DNR. That could lead to a reduction in antlerless deer killed this fall and winter. "It is very likely that antlerless license quotas will need to be reduced or eliminated in many counties in northern and central Iowa," forecasts Suchy. In southern and eastern Iowa, with higher deer numbers, he anticipates fine-tuning antlerless quotas and reviewing the January and November seasons; depending on final figures.

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WHAT HUNTERS WANT NATIONAL SURVEY SEEKS TO DETERMINE WANTS AND NEEDS OF AMERICAN DUCK HUNTERS -- IOWA REFLECTS CURRENT TRENDS

By Lowell Washburn
Iowa Department of Natural Resources

CLEAR LAKE - The National [Waterfowl] Flyway Council has released results of a

nation-wide survey which asked America's duck hunters for opinions on ducks, duck hunting, and waterfowl management. According to Flyway Council chair, Don Childress, more than 10,000 duck hunters responded to this first-of-its-kind national survey.

Survey highlights revealed that modern-day duck hunters are a highly motivated group of conservationists who take waterfowling issues very seriously. A full 72 percent of respondents listed duck hunting as their most important, or one of their most important, recreational activities. About 60 percent were in agreement with the length of their hunting seasons, and three-quarters said the daily bag limit on ducks was "about right."

Almost two-thirds (65 percent) of surveyed duck hunters said they spend more than \$250 each year [on duck hunting] and 20 percent said they spend more than \$1,000 on their sport each year. Only six percent of duck hunters between the ages of 45 and 64 indicated that they began duck hunting in the relatively recent past (1997-2004).

Survey results were reported by upper, middle, and lower groupings of states in each flyway. These groupings allow for the most meaningful comparisons among regions of the country, said Childress. For example, more than 30 percent of the waterfowlers hunting in the upper portion of the Central Flyway (North Dakota, South Dakota, and eastern Montana), said the overall quality of duck hunting over the last five years had improved, while 29 percent of the same group said it had gotten worse. By contrast, 82 percent of the duck hunters utilizing the lower portion of the Mississippi Flyway (Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Tennessee) said hunting had gotten worse.

In the national survey, 76 percent of the duck hunters questioned said they hunted all 5 of the past five seasons. In Iowa, 82 percent of the state's duck hunters hunted all 5 of the past five seasons.

Nationally, 72 percent of duck hunters said the total daily duck bag limit in the state they hunted was "about right". In Iowa, 79 percent of the hunters interviewed thought the bag limit was "about right."

Other survey findings show that contemporary duck hunters -- especially the younger ones -- readily embrace current technology. Twenty percent of duck hunters said they "frequently" access the Internet for duck hunting information; 49 percent said "once in a while," and 31 percent, "not at all."

In the national average, 53 percent of surveyed hunters said they used spinning-wing [mechanical] decoys, which compared to 67 percent use in Iowa. Both surveys revealed that a majority of duck hunters thought spinning-wings should be allowed. Nationally [and in Iowa] less than 25 percent thought mechanical decoys should be outlawed.

"We were amazed," said DNR research supervisor Terry Little. "Although there were some minor exceptions, the overall response of Iowa duck hunters was very close to how hunters responded nationwide. I think one of the things this survey shows, is that there are not really that many differences between our [Iowa] duck hunters and those from the rest of the nation.

"One of the differences between Iowa hunters and those at the southern end of the Flyway is that Iowa is a migration state. Our hunters have become very aware of the importance of having flights arrive in the right place at the right time. Our hunters have learned that timing is everything. They understand that it's not the length of time migrating ducks stay in Iowa, but is

rather getting them to come through Iowa in the first place."

That may be one of the reasons why Iowa hunters have a priority interest in having the longest hunting season possible. Iowa hunters would rather see greater restrictions in daily bag limits [such as the current short season and reduced daily limit on pintail ducks] than to see a reduction in the number of days they can hunt.

"Another thing we've learned is that the most vocal duck hunters do not necessarily reflect what the majority of hunters want," said Little. "There is a large spread, for example, over what people define as success. The expectations of hard-core, late season hunters may vary greatly from hunters taking advantage of earlier hunting days. Our [DNR] challenge is to provide opportunities for both groups. One of the values of this survey, it that it provides a significant cross section of what sort of opportunities hunters want."

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[Editor's Note: Please hold this story until Feb. 16]

MISSISSIPPI RIVER TAILWATER SAUGERS

By Joe Wilkinson

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

Another bump from below signals a fish on, to the angler bobbing above in the choppy tailwaters. Through a winter with less than ideal *ice* fishing, the Mississippi River offers a winter refuge to the coveralls and gloves crowd. Dozens of them crowd the tailwaters on a good day; boats bobbing in the waves as they try to zero in on the hot pockets of saugers and the occasional walleye below the dam.

"We took a limit today. Probably caught another limit, but a lotta smaller ones (thrown back). There was a lot of fish caught out there today," reviewed angler Jimmy Oberfoel, as he trailered his boat at the Guttenberg ramp a few days ago. Oberfoel, from Sherrill, and a couple fishing partners get out two or three times a week during the cold weather. In their cooler, a nice 15 inch sauger flopped across the rest of the catch; ranging from about the same size to a little smaller. "They've had a bite up here the last three, four days. People have been catching fish," offered Oberfoel. "And word gets out like a sprinkling can, when the fish are biting."

Most anglers go with live minnows on jigs. Oberfoel prefers plastic. "We had a combination of colors (today); what you'd call a firecracker, light blue and white. And they got 'em on chartreuse, too. The secret to catching fish out here in the winter time is give 'em what they want. Some days, they want white; some days, red or blue. It depends on what they're looking for."

Even in cold, windy weather, there are almost always a couple boats bobbing in the current. On weekends, and in good weather, that can swell to a couple dozen motoring up to within the legal limit of the locks, then trolling downstream through spots showing fish on the fishfinders. Downstream, more anglers work over the wing dams.

The parking lot is filled with license plates from all over eastern Iowa and southwest Wisconsin.

For much of the week at Guttenberg, creel clerk John Heiar checks in with them. “A typical boat has three people on board. They’ve been out maybe three hours; sometimes four or more,” says Heiar. “They’re keeping their limit a lot of the time. For the past two weeks; it was kind of ‘hit and miss,’ depending on where they would go.”

For the most part, it is saugers they are after and it is saugers they take home. The popular game fish—a close cousin to walleyes—crowd into the tailwaters through the winter. Besides the number of anglers and how many fish they kept, Heiar wants to know how many fish they released, how often they come, what they were fishing *for* and whether they were satisfied with their trip. “That usually depends on if the fish are biting that day,” he admitted.

The winter fishing dynamics are of special interest to biologists on the river, too. Tailwaters below the next three Mississippi River dams—at Dubuque, Bellevue and Fulton—are closed from December through March 15. A multi-year study hopes to determine the impact of winter fishing pressure. In a ‘normal’ winter, ice locks out anglers for much of the season; reducing fishing pressure. Over the last decade, though, there have been only one or two such winters. Biologists show a corresponding drop in sauger numbers, as they survey populations through the year. Their concern is, that too many saugers are being taken or even when immediately released, that smaller saugers are dying in larger numbers; perhaps because of air bladder damage caused by being pulled up from higher pressure depths.

With the three tailwaters off limits during the winter, biologists will compare growth and population densities of certain ‘year classes’ with those at Guttenberg, New Boston and other fisheries that remain open. Through late January, Heiar had seen eight to 10 instances of bladders extending from mouths of smaller saugers. While that might not be considered a high percentage, it comes from a pool without the 60 to 80 foot depths of Bellevue, for instance.

In the meantime, fishing in those open waters...as well as areas *downstream* from the closed tailwaters...remains as a cold weather escape for anglers waiting for spring.

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IOWA AMERICORPS MEMBERS SERVE ONE MILLION HOURS

DES MOINES – The Iowa Commission on Volunteer Service is pleased to announce a major milestone for national service. Iowa AmeriCorps members have officially broken the one-million-hour mark for direct service to the state, as measured since 2000, when such records were first kept.

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) contributed significantly to this achievement. Members in the department's AmeriCorps Keepers of the Land program logged 235,679 service hours over the last five years.

"Our members are dedicated and provide great service to the DNR and the state of Iowa," said program director Linda Terry. "They're out there pursuing their passions and leaving an environmental legacy for future Iowans."

The DNR first employed AmeriCorps members on a widespread scale in 1999, when officials created the Keepers of the Land volunteer program. Today, the department draws on the talents of 47 members, an increase of nearly four times the number of original members.

"Volunteering is a core value of our close-knit communities and a key to keeping Iowa strong and secure," said Iowa Governor Tom Vilsack. "Iowans who commit to service contribute significantly to our quality of life. They provide countless opportunities for those wanting good-paying jobs, they provide health security for our most vulnerable, and they help uphold Iowa's responsibility of making sure that children grow up with a solid educational background."

Iowa AmeriCorps members have contributed more than \$17 million worth of service to the state since 2000 based on the Bureau of Labor Statistics and Independent Sector Coalition's estimates of the value of volunteer service.

The national AmeriCorps program was established in 1994 to engage Americans of all ages and backgrounds in community-based service. In exchange for one year of service, AmeriCorps members receive an education award. Since 1994, more than 2,700 Iowa residents have qualified for more than \$9.5 million in stipends for higher education.

For more information on AmeriCorps, visit www.volunteeriowa.org, or call 1-800-308-5987. For more information on AmeriCorps Keepers of the Land contact Linda Terry at Linda.Terry@dnr.state.ia.us or at (515) 281-3079.

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TREES AND SHRUBS ON PRIVATE LAND IS VITAL FOR WILDLIFE HABITAT

AMES - Planting native trees and shrubs or maintaining forested portions on Iowa's private lands are key ingredients for successful and healthy wildlife populations. This can range from songbird habitat in the backyard to the woodlot in the 'Back 40.'

More than 300 species of wildlife have a link to Iowa's forests, and with more than 90 percent of Iowa's forests in private ownership, making improvements on private lands key to wildlife habitat in Iowa.

"To maximize wildlife benefits on your land, regardless of size, use varying plant cover to create multi layer habitat, favoring native trees and shrubs with high wildlife values," said John Walkowiak, chief of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources forestry bureau. "Look for seed, berry and fruit producing plants; conifers or evergreens that provide an important source of winter cover for wildlife; and establish living fence rows of trees, shrubs or vines to provide food, cover and travel lanes for wildlife."

The State Forest Nursery, in Ames, provides specialty wildlife packets of native tree and shrub seedlings for private land plantings. "The State Forest Nursery worked with DNR wildlife biologists and other groups, like Pheasants Forever, and the National Wild Turkey Federation, to design special wildlife packets," Walkowiak said. There are three wildlife packets containing 200 native tree and shrub seedlings each that cover ¼ to 1 acre of land, designed to meet the basic requirements of Iowa wildlife. The Pheasant Packet, Quail Packet, and Wild Turkey Packet each sell for \$90.

New this year is a "Create-Your-Own" packet that allows the individual to select up to four different tree or shrub species for \$90. Each species comes in packages of 50.

For individuals with a large backyard, there is a 20 tree and shrub Songbird packet containing oak, pine, plum, chokecherry, dogwood and serviceberry designed in cooperation with Iowa Audubon that sells for \$20.

These plants are available for home delivery at a cost of \$5 per 100 plants. For more information or to order conservation trees and shrubs from the State Forest Nursery call 1-800-865-2477 Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., or on line at www.iowatreeplanting.com. The State Forest Nursery accepts personal checks, VISA or Master Card. Trees and shrubs will be available for shipping from early April until May 31.

For more information, contact Walkowiak at 515-242-5966.

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DNR PLANS RENOVATION PROJECT AT VIKING LAKE

STANTON – Viking Lake, once the jewel of southwest Iowa bluegill, crappie and bass fishing, has been overrun by yellow bass to the point that fishing activity has dropped and the fish population is out of balance.

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources is hosting a public meeting at 7 p.m., March 7, at the concession building at Viking Lake State Park, to discuss its plans to renovate the lake.

“Viking Lake has been so severely impacted by yellow bass, that few anglers are fishing the lake and the fish population in Viking is out of balance to the point that little if any newly hatched bluegill, crappie or largemouth bass survive,” said Chris Larson, with the DNR’s fisheries staff.

The yellow bass numbers in the lake have increased dramatically over the past 10 years and currently make up 70 percent of the total panfish population. During this same period, Iowa DNR fisheries staff have documented a reduction in bluegill, crappie, and largemouth populations to the point where something drastic needs to be done. The Iowa DNR tried stocking walleye as a potential predator, but with the enormous number and current size of yellow bass now in the lake, the walleyes did not survive well.

“We plan to lower the lake level after Labor Day and apply a chemical to the water that will kill the fish. This may sound like a radical approach to some in the fishing community, but we must eliminate all the yellow bass so this problem does not happen again,” he said. “Unfortunately, there is no chemical available that can target one species of fish, without impacting other species.”

Another possible side benefit of the renovation is improved water quality. The lake currently suffers from nuisance heavy algae blooms that make the water aesthetically unappealing. This is partially responsible to grass carp releasing nutrients taken from rooted aquatic plants into the water. These nutrients are then used by algae. Grass carp were stocked in the 1980s to help control excess rooted aquatic vegetation. The problem is they have done too good of a job. There is little or no rooted aquatic plants left in the lake. The nutrients normally used by rooted aquatic plants are being used by algae, which grass carp do not eat. This has caused numerous nuisance algae blooms in the lake over the past few years. Once the grass carp are eliminated from the lake rooted plants will come back and water quality should improve dramatically once these nutrients are tied up again in rooted aquatic plants.

Viking Lake had been one of the best fishing lakes in southwest Iowa for more than 30 years for bluegill, crappie, channel catfish, and bass fishing. Yellow bass showed up in 1994, and have increased each year until finally completely taking over the fish population.

“There are fewer fishing trips to Viking Lake and that means less money is spent locally on things like gas, food, bait and other goods and service,” Larson said.

When the fishing is good, Viking Lake has an estimated nearly \$1 million annual economic impact to the area. From 1992 to 2005, fishing trips have decreased.

“After the lake is killed out in late September, we will re-stock bluegill, largemouth bass, redear sunfish and channel catfish. We also plan to work on fish habitat and install shoreline protection while the lake is low,” he said. “The work will go through March, then the gate will be closed and the lake allowed to fill.”

The DNR plans to wait until April 2008 to stock crappies. After the fish are stocked, it usually takes 2 to 3 years before fish are big enough to attract large numbers of anglers.

For more information, contact Larson at 712-769-2587.

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LANDOWNERS: KEEP THAT CRP LETTER AND OPPORTUNITY

DES MOINES – Landowners with existing Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) contracts that expire in 2007 will receive a letter from their USDA Farm Service Agency sometime this week.

“Don’t throw it away,” said Lyle Asell, special assistant for agriculture at the DNR. “That letter lays out an offer for the automatic re-enrollment or an extension of your CRP contract, an offer that many landowners will want to take advantage of.”

Landowners must notify their local Farm Service Agency by April 14, 2006, if they want to accept their re-enrollment or extension.

CRP participants with contracts expiring in 2008 and beyond will be notified later about their opportunities to re-enroll or extend their contracts.

“For the public, these lands protect our water quality, by reducing the amounts of sediment, nutrients and pesticides that reach our streams and lakes,” said Asell. “For landowners, the contract offers guaranteed income on marginal land where yields are typically less than on land more suitable for cropping.”

Landowners who receive the letter will receive one of two offers:

- Re-enrollment for those with the most vulnerable soils that yield the greatest environmental benefits if they remain in CRP. Those contracts will be offered for 10 years with restored wetlands eligible for 15 years, under a revised rental rate often higher than previous rates. Landowners will have to maintain the cover with mid-contract management (i.e., mowing or burning in the middle of the contract).
- Extensions for land that is less erosive or has a less beneficial cover type. Extensions are offered for two to five years at the existing rental rate.

Landowners can not amend the USDA contract offers by adding additional land, changing the length of the contract or with different terms for the contract. However, landowners can re-enroll or extend only part of the current acres under contract.

The DNR has wildlife biologists and foresters who can answer questions about enrollment. Call 515-281-5918 for the name of a biologist near you or contact your local USDA Farm Service Agency office for assistance.

Both offers are subject to a compliance check, with a site visit from USDA.

Comment [MSOffice1]: I took most out. Should I take it all out?

For media inquiries, contact Kelly Smith, Iowa DNR, at 515-281-6247.

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Iowa Fishing Report

www.iowadnr.com

Feb. 14, 2006

For current information on fishing conditions for your lake or area, contact the office in that district. Phone numbers are listed with each district report.

Northwest

Spirit Lake (Dickinson): Anglers are catching walleyes off Buffalo Run and off Mini-wakan. Fish are being caught mainly on jigging minnow style baits. A few perch are being caught off Buffalo Run and Cottonwood Point in 20 feet of water. Bluegill fishing is fair off the North Grade, with a lot of sorting required.

West Okoboji Lake (Dickinson): Bluegills are being caught using wax worms in Emerson Bay and off Pocahontas Point, generally in 8 to 10 feet of water. A few perch are being caught between Eagle Point and Pocahontas Point. Some northern pike are being taken on tip ups in Emerson Bay.

Storm Lake (Buena Vista): Walleye fishing is fair between 4 p.m. and 7 p.m. using jigging spoons tipped with minnow heads or live minnows. Lots of sorting is required to get fish over the 15-inch minimum length limit.

Clear Lake (Cerro Gordo): Ice conditions are variable and anglers should use caution! Areas of the lake have newly formed ice with the recent cold snap. These areas have thin ice covered by snow. Drill test holes to insure you are on adequate ice. Yellow bass are hitting the best north and east of the Island in 14-17 feet of water. Small jigging spoons and minnows are working the best. The hour before sunset provides the most consistent action. Walleye fishing is slow. Mostly sub-legal sized fish are being caught.

For more information on fishing in northwest Iowa, call the regional office in Spirit Lake at 712-336-1840.

Northeast

Ice fishing is not recommended in northeast Iowa.

For information on fishing in northeast Iowa, call the regional office in Manchester at 563-927-3276.

Southeast

Ice fishing is not recommended or even possible in some cases. Some of the smaller county ponds have refrozen with about one and a half inches of ice.

Iowa and Cedar rivers: A few anglers are fishing for walleyes below the dams and in deeper pools with some success.

Mississippi River Pools 16 to 19: The Mississippi River and the backwaters in **Pools 16 to 19** remain unsafe for ice fishing. Ice chunks are beginning to appear on the Mississippi with the recent cold weather. At the gauging station on **Pool 16** (Lock and Dam 16-Muscatine) the water temperature is 33 degrees and the river pool stage is 11.42 feet and is expected to remain stable over the next several days. Fishing continues to be fair for walleye and sauger in the tail waters of **Lock and Dam 16 to 19**. Anglers still report the best success at **tail water 16** (Muscatine) and **tail water 17** (New Boston). Most anglers are using jigs with twister tails or hair jigs tipped with a minnow. With the colder water temperatures anglers should slow their presentation of baits and when using jigs use as small of jig as possible but still be able to feel the bottom of the river.

For more information on fishing in southeast Iowa, call the regional office in Brighton at 319-694-2430.

Southwest

Most lakes in southwest Iowa have no ice. Lakes in the region that do have ice should be considered unsafe. Little fishing activity has been reported.

For more information on fishing in southwest Iowa, call the regional office in Lewis at 712-769-2587.

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